

TESTIMONY OF KEN J. ROBINETTE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
SOUTH CENTRAL COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP (SCCAP), BEFORE THE
HOUSE ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF FY 2018 DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY FUNDING
May 3, 2017

Good morning, my name is Ken Robinette and I'm the CEO of the South Central Community Action Partnership in Twin Falls, Idaho. I am pleased to submit testimony today in support of the Department of Energy's (DOE) Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and I respectfully urge this committee to fund the Weatherization Assistance Program in fiscal year 2018 at a level of \$230 million. I am deeply concerned about the Administration's proposal to eliminate the WAP, and I believe this funding level is essential in continuing and improving the outstanding results of the program.

The WAP celebrated its 40 year anniversary in 2016, and I've been working in weatherization for the past 38 of those years. Today I want to highlight the impact that WAP has nationwide, as well as demonstrate how the program makes a difference in my state of Idaho.

The WAP is a proven, cost-effective, and successful model of a Federal, State, and local partnership. WAP services are delivered by more than 900 local organizations, many of which are Community Action Agencies like mine. WAP operates in every corner of our nation, making a difference in both urban and rural communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Territories, and Native American tribes. Since its inception in 1976, over 7.4 million homes have been weatherized by WAP- that's 7.4 million families with extra money in their pockets and living in safer, healthier, more comfortable homes.

It's widely known that families with low-incomes pay a larger portion of their income towards home energy costs than their higher income counterparts- about 16% of income versus just 3% according to Oak Ridge National Lab. Weatherization helps alleviate this high energy

burden through cost-effective energy efficiency improvements such as insulation, air sealing, HVAC systems, lighting, and appliances. According to DOE, in cold weather states WAP can reduce heating costs by an average of 30% and families in weatherized homes save at least \$283 each year on their energy costs. This income can be used to pay for other goods like food, medicine, and education. Families don't have to make the impossible choice between heating and eating.

According to economists at the Home Energy Affordability Gap project, Idaho households with incomes of below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level pay a staggering 21% of their annual income simply for their home energy bills. Idaho has 6 WAP providers that serve all 44 Counties of our mostly rural state. On average over the past 5 years these 6 agencies with an average DOE state allocation of \$1.6 million dollars have weatherized annually 974 homes of families and individuals that are economically disadvantaged. Of those homes weatherized each year more than 2400 Individuals, of which 485 Elderly, 480 Disabled and 328 children under the age of 17 now live in a more energy efficient and safer home. Many of our families submit letters of thanks for the assistance they received. I would like to share one of those letters from a family who owns their home in the small farming community of Hazelton. This family, where dad and mom are both working with 1 small child who is disabled writes, *"We are so grateful and couldn't thank you all enough for everything. I was so amazed at how professional all the guys were. They all were a pleasure to have in our home, and very trustworthy. I want all the guys to know how great a job they did! Our home used a third of electricity and a lot less coal. It is so comfortable and we can't feel drafts anywhere. The proof is in our reduction of our power bill. Also my son has only had one minor cold. Last year he had several because of all the cold drafts and fluctuation in temperature. This is one program I feel helps people help themselves."*

My family and I couldn't thank you guys enough! I wish the government knew how important this program is, and how it truly helps those who otherwise can't afford it. Pay it forward, God Bless!

In addition to providing substantial energy savings to hard working American families, the WAP also makes homes healthier and safer. For every \$1 invested in weatherization, \$2.78 were generated in health and safety benefits. Weatherization measures generally improve ventilation, mitigate mold, and improve indoor air quality. As a result, residents of weatherized homes experience fewer asthma and allergy symptoms, as well fewer hospitalizations. Children in weatherized homes missed fewer days of school and their parents missed fewer days of work. In the Oak Ridge National Lab study of WAP, residents reported paying on average \$514 less each year in out of pocket medical expenses after weatherization. Today, Idaho agencies have a current active waiting list of over 8400 income eligible households needing weatherization assistance. With our average annual household completion that equates to more than 8 years that families wait to receive this service. We do provide emergency services to eligible homeowners during the winter months with no heat due to broken or unsafe heating system and prioritize the other households that have elderly, disabled and young children.

Not only does the WAP make drastically needed improvements to our nation's aging housing stock, but it also helps American workers and American businesses. The WAP directly supports more than 8,500 jobs and indirectly supports thousands more in related industries. The WAP has provided training and workforce development to thousands of low and middle-income workers, allowing them to secure stable employment across the entire supply chain- from WAP crews, material suppliers, tech companies, and more. For my agency in south central Idaho, our crew based staff weatherizes approximately 80 homes per year. We currently employ 14 trained

technicians, 2 of whom are Quality Control Inspectors or referred to as QCI, one of the highest certifications in the WAP network that assures every home weatherized is carefully inspected to DOE standards and regulations. We contract with over 10 independent contractors in the construction trades such as HVAC and Electrical and purchase our weatherization materials and supplies from 24 local vendors and 11 major dealers.

Idaho is also a great example of another key success of the WAP- a strong record of leveraging additional funds to supplement federal dollars. The main method of leveraging is through partnerships with electric and gas utilities, many of which depend on the WAP delivery network to carry out low-income residential efficiency initiatives. At least 21 states were able to leverage additional funds from utilities in 2015, increasing the impact of the WAP in these states. This leveraging activity is only possible with the critical base money from DOE, as well as DOE's reputation and high quality standards. In Idaho, we have had long standing partnerships with 3 of our largest private investor own utility companies; Idaho Power, Avista and Rocky Mountain Power that over the past 5 years contributed more than \$11.8 million dollars that were invested in approximately 2200 households throughout the state.

In closing, I would like to extend my gratitude to all of you for your hard work and continued support of WAP over the years. I again respectfully urge the Subcommittee to fund the WAP at \$230 million for FY 2018, the funding level necessary to sustain a national program to serve low-income families in all local communities as it has traditionally done. This is a program that has proved its worth and effectiveness for over forty years. WAP provides essential services to thousands of low-income families, resulting in greater energy savings, increased health and safety, more living wage jobs, and increased leveraging of other funds— outcomes that will benefit the nation. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Ken J. Robinette
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